

Choosing children's activities

Have fun be safe

"There are so many activities to choose from in local communities and parents and carers want to encourage children and young people to take part. But how do you know if they're safe?"

- Children have a right to have fun and be safe
- Organisations should be open and welcoming and should share information about themselves and their activities
- You have the right to the same standards of care from all organisations, whether their workers are paid or are volunteers
- Listen to your child and ask questions about the activities they take part in

Check it out

A good organisation will welcome questions about their activities and the safety of their surroundings. All organisations should have a child protection policy, including a statement on, and guidelines about, keeping children safe. In addition these are questions you may want to ask:

- Are the staff and volunteers suitable to work with children?
All staff and volunteers should go through a proper recruitment process, which includes interviews and references and, where appropriate, police checks.
- Is there a written code of behaviour?
All organisations should have a written code of behaviour, which outlines good practice when working with children. An environment that allows behaviour such as bullying, shouting, racism and sexism is not acceptable.
- How does the organisation manage staff and volunteers?
There should be someone in charge who supervises staff and volunteers.
- How does the organisation provide for personal care needs?
In the case of very young children, or those with a disability, you should ask about routines for toileting, feeding and administering medication.
- Does the organisation have a health and safety policy?
Find out if there is a leader qualified in first aid, that there is a first aid box and that the premises have passed fire regulations.
- What are the arrangements when children go on outings?
You should be told about all the necessary arrangements - including transport to and from - for every outing, no matter how long or short, and you should be asked for your agreement.

Be wary of...

- Behaviour that encourages rough play, sexual innuendo or embarrassing punishments.
- Staff who take charge and operate independently of organisational guidelines.
- Staff who show favouritism or personally reward specific children.
- Encouragement of inappropriate physical contact.
- Poor communication and lack of parental involvement, leaving you feeling uneasy.
- Invitations for children to spend time alone with staff or volunteers (even to visit their home).

Remember, listen to your children and ask questions about the activities they take part in.

Safe at all times

Parents and carers have a right and a responsibility to ensure that children are safe at all times. Organisations have a responsibility to be open and welcoming and to share information about themselves and their activities. Daycare activities, such as pre-school playgroups and crèches, are required to register with the local Health and Social Services Trust. But not all organisations providing supervised activities - such as uniformed organisations, sports clubs and youth clubs - have to register; yet they still have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for your child.

Many activities are supported by volunteers who generously give their time to provide regular activities for your child. However, whether or not workers are paid, you have the right to expect the same standards from all organisations.

Voicing concerns

Organisations should tell you where to go and what to do if you or your child has any worries. You may feel reluctant to voice your concerns in case you are wrong or worried about the impact on your child, but if you are concerned you must take action:

- Speak to other parents.
- Speak to the leader in charge.
- If you are not confident that they are the right person, talk to someone more senior.
- If you are unhappy about the response you receive, remove your child and contact any of the organisations listed in the Contacts column (left).

ACTION

Find out as much information as you can about the organisation - ask other parents.

Don't be afraid to ask questions.

WHAT TO SAY

Are the staff/volunteers suitable? What are their policies on child protection?

WARNING SIGNS

Activities where parents are discouraged from staying to watch or becoming involved. Children who drop out or stop going to activity for no apparent reason.

Behavioural changes.

PREVENTION

Find out as much as you can before letting your child join an organisation or activity.

CONTACTS

- NSPCC
0800 800 5000

*Check the ACPC website for the latest phone numbers:
www.iwight.com/parents*